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The Whiskey Rebellion:

The First Test of Authority

One of the first events that set the new constitution in stone was Western Pennsylvania’s Whiskey Rebellion. Taking place in near and surrounding counties and townships, Pittsburgh’s very own farmers marched through the streets we call home, outraged by the new tax on whiskey. Alexander Hamilton knew that the country needed a steady source of revenue in order to sustain the country; therefore set up a plan to get the country out of extreme debt from war. The idea of taxation was immediately controversial, and Westerners felt as if they were being targeted by this tax since whiskey was one of the more popular drinks in the area. This so called ‘insurrection’ was the very first event that put the newly constructed constitution to test.

As the tax officers came to collect the annual tax on a popular product, tensions built to the point of snapping. The resistance continued on through 1792 and early into 1793. But the tensions came to its climax in 1794 when a when a local tax officers home was attacked and destroyed by the residents. On August 7th, 1794, President George Washington made a proclamation calling out the rebels, and ordering all unaffected Western Pennsylvanians to return to the safety of their homes. Hamilton knew that presence of a potentially hostile force of rebels in Pennsylvania could not be tolerated. If the country were to thrive, they would have to show that they are capable of maintaining control within the country. Then armed and equipped an impressive 13,000 man army to march into Pittsburgh to meet the growing force of rebels. By the time the large force arrived at Pittsburgh, the rebellion had collapsed, and most of the people involved had fled the area before any shot were fired. Only two men were convicted of treason. This was the first test that the new constitution faced. And the government of America showed that they were in control, and they would not be overthrown by some rebellion.

The Whiskey Rebellion is the earliest example in American History of the government taking control of a potentially dangerous situation and showing to the public that it is not a force to be reckoned with. A theme of nationalism is also a theme this event. Nationalism is evident when even the highest position in government led the army into battle, confident that his country would not fail him. This marked the first time a president ever led a group of soldiers into battle. Also, nationalism is brought about to the fact that George Washington led not just a small group of soldiers, but a 13,000 man crew into Western Pennsylvania. He took great pride in running the country and it was evident when he showed that he meant business and set the standard for all people that follow.